

## PERCY HAMMOND'S LETTER

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NEW YORK, Sept. 30.—It is not easy for a reviewer who is averse to indelicacy to write of so bare a play as "La Tendresse." Not, of course, because it is a wicked drama, for, compared with others, its conduct is lamblike and its intentions good. But it presents with the cleanest overtone characteristic of the French, a dilemma or two which causes those Americans who have to report it to be perplexed.

How far, the dramatic critic often asks himself, how far should I go in telling the public of the happenings upon the stage? If I disclose the half of it, he wonders will my readers blush and bar me from the mails? If I am sinking in my report and hide behind the prudent euphemisms, will they understand my meaning and not be benefited thereby?

He becomes a wary expert in capon synonyms. He collects and employs smug enough substitutes for the visceral nouns and adjectives signifying misbehavior between the sexes. He describes a dubious lady as a "wanton" or a "little sister of the night," and her habits as "unconventional." As a result he is neither one thing nor the other, and his occupation becomes classified among the parasitic and ornamental. He is negative alike to Ben Hecht and to Mr. Sumner, the New York viceregent. Ashton Stevens, an erstwhile colleague of mine, once told me of his plan for recording the ruddy shows. "I never write anything," he said, "that I dare not say to a nice, unassuming woman, who may happen to sit beside me at a dinner party."

I shall be just as careful. Henry Miller in "La Tendresse" is an ageing academician, in love with his youthful mistress (Miss Ruth Chatterton), a pretty lady of the Paris theatre. She is true to him in this way: Discovering that her fondness for him is inimical to his health, she decides that it is better for both of them that they shall be just pals, rejoicing mutually in a merely mental companionship. He loves her because she is young color in his sunset; she adores him because he is tender and talks well, as he should, since it is said of him in the play that he is "the greatest writer of his generation."

How shall the lady fortify her love for her elderly paramour, if that is not too indecent a term? Well, during her summer holiday in the south of France, she meets a handsome movie actor, who agrees to help her out. He will fulfill her physical "caprices," as she calls them, leaving her to be faithful, sentimentally, to the middle-aged academician. Of course, their innocent unchastities are discovered. Hell, thereafter, is to pay in ingenious situations contrived by Henri Battaille, the French author. The ancient literary man secretes a couple of stenographers behind a curtain and they shorthand a hot interview between his lady love and her movie man. These guilty words are at once incorporated in a play he is writing for her and in a sort of private rehearsal he makes her eat them. As Miss Chatterton falters before the evidence of her little human perfidies, Mr. Miller hurts at her the most horrible epithets: "You are," says he, "a wanton!"

Mr. Miller plays "the greatest writer of his generation" in a way which flatters all of the great writers from Anatole France to Irvn S. Cobb, who was absent in boxes on the first night, with

ner, Hugh Walpole, "Boggs" Baer, Robert Benchley and some one of whom it was said that he was either Brander Matthews or William Lyons Phelps. Miss Chatterton was admirably the acute female, who was able to distinguish the difference between body-love and the love of the spiritual type. After the big scene wherein Mr. Miller bade her to begone, and she went away so well, I wondered why she is not acclaimed as a stupendous performer. I should myself do considerable huzzling did I not suspect that she is, even in her most careless moments, just a fatal bit too studied, too precise, dovetailed and well rehearsed. I recommend Mr. Miller and Miss Chatterton unequivocally, and "La Tendresse" with reservation, to visiting playgoers.

Miss Barrymore telephoned me today that she is hopeful, happy and well bestowed in her forthcoming impersonation of Hauptmann's "Rosa Bernd," who, like Tess of the D'Urbervilles, was ruined while unconscious and not expecting it. "It is," said she, "the best thing I ever did," and who should have more inside information than Miss Barrymore, one of the squarest and most sagacious of the theatre? Details of the seduction of Rosa Bernd and the psychology attached thereto should wait until time has permitted prompt and proper pondering over them.

Following are brief minutes concerning things which should or should not be gone to:

"It's a Boy"—William Anthony McGuire, a canny playwright, shows as he showed in "Six Cylinder Love," the tribulations that may happen to new-layeds who, as the poet has it, bite off more than they can chew. Commercially successful in Carbondale, Pa., they move to New York, expecting to be New Yorkers, and they are. Gay nights, pool-pooling the street cars and the buses, and neglecting the baby boy, bridge debt, discharge, humiliation, remorse and beginning of life anew.

Sauvageous hokum, savored with the usual condiments of the Broadway drama, Robert Ames, Dorothy McKaye, Joseph Kligger, and a hitherto unknown, Millicent Hanley, evince deserved applause.

"Banco"—Miss Claire Kummer's bright adaptation of some French frothiness, which involves Mr. Alfred Lunt as a wild-eyed gambling Frenchman of the jumping jack type, who is subdued by, and who subdues Miss Lois Fisher. An effective conflict—Miss Fisher, who is unlike against air Lunt, whose activities are those of a panting fan. They come together at the end, making the farce a minor tragedy.

"East of Suez"—In which Miss Florence Reed, as the devastating Eurasian offspring of an English father, and a Chinese mother, makes trouble for the western men, who kiss her upon her red mouth. It is a tedious, lousy, melodrama, by W. Somerset Maugham, who is, no doubt, ashamed of it, as all the great writers are sometimes ashamed of their paltrier works. "East of Suez" is not to be recommended to you by a conscientious courier through the playhouses any more than is:

"The Exalters"—An excessively bad show by Martin Brown, who is a good and earnest dancer, but who, unhappily, seems to have written "The Exalters" with his hands instead of his feet. Miss Tallulah Bankhead, the most celebrated of the forty-fourth, most southern belles, appears in this

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harmless theatrical moron as a bizarre something or other, who has pretty legs to strap a useless gun upon, and a passion for a gibbering, imbecilic burglar (Alan Dinehart). The play is still on Broadway. It would last maybe, thirty minutes in Peoria, before they laughed it out, and in Detroit or Milwaukee they wouldn't even let it open. But so long as there are New Yorkers in New York, and pilgrims from the outside who grow dizzy and unconscious as they register at the Ritz, such dramas as "The Exalters" will be possible. The Y. W. C. A. has protective representatives at the railway terminal advising the visiting virgins where and where not to go. Why shouldn't the Drama League establish a bureau for booby and incoming theatregoers to take them in hand and tell them what are and what are not the worth while things. The fact that the Drama League does not do this, suggests that it owns what one seldom suspects that it owns, a sense of humor.

## THEATRES

Theme of "Universal Appeal" in Picture at Utah Theatre.

If opinions of critics in other cities mean anything to local picture fans, Lois Weber's latest screen production, "What Do Men Want?" will offer something unusual in entertainment when this great American drama of the hunt for happiness opens its engagement at the Utah theatre today.

Miss Weber who is credited with having produced more successful photoplays than any other person in the film industry, wrote and directed such masterly productions as "Where Are My Children?" "The Price of a Good Time," "To Please One Woman," "Scandal," "The Blot" and numerous other big-time hits that have thrilled millions of picture fans all over the country.

"What Do Men Want?" Miss Weber's most recent contribution to the silver sheet, is a vivid portrayal of small-town life and small-town people, yet in this powerful drama, as in all her pictures, she not only supplies the full measure of entertainment but also puts over a moral that is applicable to people of all classes.

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